



Creating Tomorrow's Foodservice Leaders



MENTOR'S GUIDE

National Restaurant Association
EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

OVERVIEW

WHAT IS THE PROSTART® PROGRAM?

The ProStart program, developed and administered by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NRAEF), is a nationwide system of high school restaurant and foodservice courses linked with mentored work experiences.

The ProStart program is comprised of state-driven industry and educational partnerships throughout the country, and it exists as the national umbrella organization for restaurant and foodservice career education.

To learn more about the ProStart program visit www.weareprostart.org.

HOW DOES THE PROSTART PROGRAM WORK?

The ProStart program in each state is based on a partnership between that state's restaurant association and the state department of education.

At the national level, the ProStart program sets the standard of quality for state restaurant and foodservice educational programs.

The program links classroom learning with on-the-job experience. Skills learned at the workplace are reinforced through practical classroom instruction. High school students learn business skills in the classroom and become acquainted with career opportunities at career workshops and on field trips. They also gain practical skills during on-site, hands-on experiences at local restaurants and foodservice work sites.

The ProStart program fulfills two objectives: 1) Students get a head start toward exciting and rewarding restaurant and foodservice careers; and 2) Restaurant and foodservice industry supervisors and mentors take the lead in meeting the labor demands of the next decade.

WHAT IS A MENTOR?

Teacher? Supervisor? Coach? Counselor? Role Model?

As a mentor, you will play different roles at different times, according to your student employee's needs. Mentors help students make the connection between their present performance and their future. Mentors provide overall support for student goals, career competence and character development in the following ways:

Teacher—Instructs students in various areas not limited to job tasks.

Supervisor—Gives direction. Thinks in terms of how students fit into the needs of the organization.

Coach—Provides motivation and information to help students meet performance expectations.
Gives ongoing feedback and encouragement.

Counselor—Helps students work through problems or attitudes that affect job performance.

Role Model—Leads by example. Helps students develop effective professional skills and habits.



BENEFITS

TOP 10

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MENTORING?

Personal Benefits

- Play an important role in a student's life.
- Contribute to the future of the restaurant and foodservice industry.
- Learn by teaching.
- Improve your supervisory and management skills.
- Explore new ways of looking at your job and operation.

Company Benefits

- Gain motivated student employees who are focused on the industry as a career.
- Groom potential employees by creating a rewarding work experience.
- Create new operating procedures with the skills and fresh ideas learned through mentoring.
- Contribute to the industry by helping create a high-quality labor pool.



TOP 10 STEPS MENTORS TAKE TO ENGAGE STUDENTS

- 1 **Treat students like the valuable resource they are**—our future workforce!
- 2 **Communicate** with students at least 15 minutes per week (longer when necessary).
- 3 **Track** student's competencies on a regular basis.
- 4 **Understand** the importance of the rotational work experience, which is designed to keep students interested.
- 5 **Discuss** any problems or questions about the program with the program teacher or coordinator.
- 6 **Explain** why college is the next step to a successful career.
- 7 **Provide** the student with a letter of recommendation upon completion of the work experience.
- 8 **Volunteer** to speak in class and offer the teacher a site visit whenever possible.
- 9 **Be an advocate** for the industry.
- 10 **Share** the tremendous opportunity this program represents to the students.

WHAT TO EXPECT

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Prepare Other Employees

- Make sure all your supervisors and employees know why the student employee is there and understand program goals.
- Enlist their enthusiasm and support.
- You don't have to do it all yourself. Delegate responsibilities to qualified employees but maintain control of the student's experience.

Orient the Student to the Company and the Work Site

Does your organization have a formal, well-organized orientation process? Can you provide the student employee with a standard orientation package or handbook? Orientation should address the following issues:

- Brief history of the company, its products, services, and customer base
- Building layout
- Requests for time off
- Breaks
- Dress code
- Telephone use
- Eating on the job and consuming company food

- Lines of supervisory authority: To whom are student employees directly responsible?
- Sanitation and safety procedures
- Smoking policy (Policy should state that minors are not allowed to smoke on premises.)
- Payroll system – timekeeping, schedules, pay periods, deductions
- Impact of their jobs on the company and their fellow co-workers
- Student involvement by including the student in informal meetings and work-related discussions

Share Your Success Story

- How did you get started in your career?
- What qualifying skills did you start with?
- What skills did you acquire, and how?

Discussion Expectations

- Create expectations for the student's behavior and performance.
- Make sure students understand these expectations. Inexperienced young people may think that simply putting their time in the program will prepare them for a job in the restaurant and foodservice industry, or that you are going to “give” them what they need.

Discuss Career Opportunities and Future Outlook

Pass on your insider's knowledge. In any job, there are ways of doing things that separate the great employees from the merely good ones. You were chosen as a mentor because you've already proven yourself in the workplace. Now you have a chance to pass it on and help a young person in the process.

- Share your vision for your career and for your organization. Students will be interested in the career decisions you've made for yourself.
- Explain why you chose this kind of work. What do you like and dislike about it?
- Expose student employees to a spectrum of opportunities by involving them in different aspects of the business.
- Help students explore the wide variety of careers that can be found within your organization.
- Emphasize the opportunities for careers and advancement for everyone regardless of sex, race, age, religion, etc. The most important ingredients for success include performance, skill and attitude.
- Share with students any information you may have regarding career ladders, training, job descriptions and salary ranges.

MENTORING

YOU'RE GOING TO BE A
GREAT MENTOR

Diversity

- The biggest challenge to successful mentoring is learning to value diversity.
- How much professional and personal experience do you have associating with people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds? To understand and support students, it is important to deal with any issues you may have accepting and working with differences.
- Discomfort with others also leads to a lack of critical feedback. If you're not giving students honest feedback, you're denying them the opportunity to learn and grow.
- As a mentor, it is your responsibility to respect students' differences. Your respect for them models how they should respect others.
- Diversity in an organization is an asset because it offers a variety of ways to think about problems and business strategies and better serve a diverse customer base.

Communication

- Be clear about assignments, expectations and sources of help.
- Be alert for non-verbal clues to students' feelings because teenagers are often uncomfortable expressing themselves openly to people they don't know well. These clues may be:
 - Avoiding eye contact
 - Slumped shoulders
 - Lowered energy or productivity levels
 - Tension or nervousness

Self-Esteem

- Find positive ways of interacting to help boost the student's self-esteem. The uncertainties of adolescence and of beginning to move into self-directed life can affect confidence and self-image.
- Many teenagers are easily embarrassed. As with other employees, using discretion when giving personal comments and negative feedback is important. Discuss any sensitive issues in private in an appropriate and professional manner.

Other Values That Are Very Important to Today's Young Workforce Include:

- Appreciation
- Flexibility
- Personal development
- Involvement
- Having fun
- Integrity
- Respecting their views and opinions

Patience

Treat mistakes as learning experiences for students and yourself. Most effective ways to handle mistakes:

- Define the problem.
- Figure out what went wrong. Don't blame.
- Decide what should be done to correct the problem, then do it.
- Put it behind you.

Think about the beginning of your career in the restaurant and foodservice industry. Who taught you the skills that helped you get to where you are today?

Was there someone who acted as your mentor? Your answers to these questions will help you get started with your young beginners.

HELPING STUDENTS

Develop Talent

- Help students identify interests, capabilities and skills they already possess.
- Help students identify areas needing improvement.
- Discuss performance in neutral, non-judgmental terms. Focus on the performance issues and tasks rather than the person. Teenagers' self-esteem can be fragile.
- Think of ways to eliminate the performance gap (the difference between what you expected and what the student produced).
- Did students understand what was expected?
- Did they have adequate training?
- Is there a way to redesign the task/assignment/method to make it more workable?
- Ask students for their suggestions.

Give Feedback

- Give both positive and negative feedback. If you withhold constructive criticism, students will not learn the changes necessary to improve their skills.
- Focus on performance and outcomes.
- Be clear about what skills need improvement, and ask students to suggest ways to improve.
- Expect that students want to – and can – improve.
- Give students a professional performance evaluation based on your organization's evaluation procedures.

Build Trust

- If a student has never had a job, you will be his or her first example of a manager, supervisor or boss. Working with you in the adult world, students learn what it means to be a responsible adult.
- Let students know you trust them. If trust is broken, deal with the issue immediately.
- Be trustworthy yourself. Keep your word. Honor confidentiality. Do not share private information about other employees.
- When faced with a delicate situation, remain professional.

Develop Character

Teach and reinforce good work habits:

- Dependability
- Responsibility
- Courtesy to customers and co-workers
- Motivation and willingness to learn
- Positive attitudes
- Communicate the importance of a focused, positive attitude to career success
- Obey organization rules
- Follow supervisors' directives
- Be cooperative and help co-workers

Set Goals

- Make goals short-term. Achieving success, particularly early on, and especially repeated successes, is a proven motivator. Define how and when you will measure progress and achieve goals.
- Expect students to turn in their work experience competency checklists that outline the goals a student should attain.





Student Internship Highlights:

- Four semesters: broad-based and rotational.
- Work site industry operator mentors oriented by the state partner.
- 15-20 hours/week – school year; after school until 9:00 p.m. on school nights; anytime on weekends. Full work week in the summer.
- Student internship wages: prevailing wage.
- The employer has the right to interview, hire and terminate, if necessary.
- The mentor, program coordinator and student should develop a training plan incorporating as many stations as possible.
- Competencies are evaluated bi-weekly at 15–20 minute conferences. When all competencies are met, a student moves to a new station.

Motivate and Empower Your Student Employees

- Promote team spirit. It works in sports, and it works in restaurant and foodservice operations. Encourage friendly competition between work teams with contests or reward programs.
- Recognize and reward good performance immediately. A timely reward is more meaningful and appreciated.
- Express positive expectations.
- Listen to students' ideas and use them when appropriate.
- Give students enough responsibility to promote a feeling of ownership.

Explain the Workplace Culture

Discuss how students should deal with customers who are friends.

- Lengthy or personal conversations on the job.
- Request for special treatment or prices.
- Business confidentiality.

Model The Proper Use of Authority

- Use your power and authority as a supervisor to assist in the learning experience, not to apply undue pressure.
- Insist that regular employees respect students and treat them like team members.

Encourage Professionalism

- Emphasize that your reason for being in business is to serve the needs of your customers.
- Help student employees relate present learning to the real world and their own futures. Example: how to use math skills they are presently learning to help convert recipes or help determine menu prices.

Help Students Succeed

- Make it clear that you are taking an interest in the students. Ask them what they are learning at school and talk about how schoolwork and other activities lay the groundwork for success.
- Let your students know that you support their efforts to learn. Set up meetings with industry contacts who can expose the student employees to something different or special. Set up a meeting for them.
- Be patient. Don't expect too much too soon.
- Give factual, non-judgmental feedback frequently.



CHALLENGES

CHALLENGES FACING MENTORS

Introducing young people to the working environment is a rewarding experience. It does, however, present challenges.

Mentors may experience some of the following obstacles:

Student employees may lack a clear commitment to the work experience.

Students may be committed to their experience, but may never have worked before. They may have to be reminded of the opportunities that will await them after completing the work experience.

Student employees sometimes have to be monitored more regularly than other entry-level employees.

Try to “team-mentor,” so that the management team and/or a few experienced employees share the responsibility for monitoring the students’ progress.

Students sometimes have difficulty juggling priorities, such as after-school sports or spending time with friends.

Discuss the time commitment required to complete the work experience and help students prioritize their goals.

Students often have a hard time communicating their problems or needs.

Clarify a student’s concerns so you are able to clearly work out a solution.

Student employees might not work for you for more than a few months.

To allow students to experience various aspects of the industry, some programs may shift students among several businesses during the two years of the program. The continuous rotation of student employees gives your operation access to more potential employees following graduation.



HOW TO MINIMIZE THESE CHALLENGES

In order to minimize these challenges, students must sign the employment agreement, which outlines the requirements for the work experience. Students must live up to this agreement in order to qualify for the ProStart National Certificate of Achievement.

Some student employees might not view this experience as their first step to a career in the restaurant and foodservice industry. However, your mentorship will still be valuable to the student by instilling lifelong work habits. You can help these students:

- Strengthen their attitude about the importance of work
- Understand job ethics, punctuality, cleanliness, and other basic personal qualities and skills
- Learn teamwork
- Understand why customer satisfaction is at the root of every business endeavor
- Gain a lifelong appreciation of hospitality patrons and employees

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

Let's say you enjoy your mentoring experience so much that you want to become even more involved. The possibilities are endless, of course, but here are a few opportunities you might want to consider:

HOST A TOUR OF YOUR OPERATION

Working with your state program director and teachers, sponsor a visit to your business for small groups of new or potential students. Model the tour after a typical tour that a new employee would have on his or her first day. Introduce students to as many co-workers as time permits. Have your co-workers explain what they do during a typical business day. Encourage questions from students.

GUEST SPEAK

You know what it takes to put a smile on a customer's face. You know how to make your business run like a well-oiled machine. Your first-hand knowledge of the restaurant and foodservice industry is something you should share with both students and their teachers. A quick 30-minute talk on what employers look for in a new employee could go a long way toward letting students know what you expect from them throughout the school year.

SPONSOR A FIELD TRIP TO A LOCAL RESTAURANT OR FOODSERVICE-RELATED TRADE SHOW

Let students see the many facets of the industry and show them there are a multitude of careers and opportunities available.

COORDINATE FIELD TRIPS TO YOUR VENDOR'S FACILITIES OR...

Encourage them to spend a minute with the students when they visit your establishment. Another way to broaden your students' exposure to industry opportunities is to contact your vendors and arrange field trips to their businesses.

HAVE STUDENTS DEVELOP NEW IDEAS OR PROMOTIONS

Given a chance, students can often come up with great ideas for new products and promotions. Turn the process of coming up with a new product concept into a contest, offering the winner prizes like free movie passes or a free meal for them or their family.



Mentoring young people is a rewarding experience that requires patience, enthusiasm, and conviction. Your efforts will not only contribute positively to the student's growth, but your commitment will help you become a better manager. Your company will benefit from your expanded knowledge, and the industry will gain a valuable employee.

Remember to communicate openly and often with your student employees, their teachers and advisors, and decision makers in your organization. Involvement is what will make the difference.

The lives you touch will continue to grow in many ways. Congratulations and good luck!

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Legal Considerations

Minimum Age Standards and Federal Child Labor Law Guidelines

There are various legal issues to take into account when hiring teenagers to work in your operation. However, because the ProStart program is considered a cooperative vocational training program under a recognized state or local educational authority, there are exemptions for teenage workers.

Please note there are required child labor restrictions as to hours, driving and hazardous jobs by the Department of Labor under the federal and state levels. To view current laws declared by the Department of Labor, visit www.youthrules.dol.gov/employers. Please contact your legal counsel to check scope and applicability under federal and state laws. You can also contact your local school board, state board of education, state restaurant association, local restaurant association and/or department of labor for further specification.

It is the responsibility of both the school and the mentor to comply fully with all federal, state, and local laws when participating in the program. All states have child labor laws and compulsory school attendance laws. Other federal and state laws may have higher standards. When these apply, the law setting the higher standards must be observed.

This overview is for reference only and is not intended as legal advice.

